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TAGS: [KN](#) [KS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: CHUNG OVERTAKES SOHN IN POLLS

REF: SEOUL 2845

Classified By: POL Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: Chung Dong-young's early victories in the first rounds of the liberal United New Democratic Party's (UNDP) primaries (See reftel) boosted his poll ratings into the double digits for the first time. A September 18 Donga Ilbo newspaper poll also showed a six percent drop for conservative frontrunner and GNP candidate Lee Myung-bak and a three percent dip for the UNDP's previous poll leader, Sohn Hak-kyu. Sohn's support rate now compares to fellow UNDP hopeful Lee Hae-chan and independent candidate Moon Kook-hyun. End Summary.

Follow the Winner

12. (C) Former Unification Minister Chung Dong-young's win over the weekend in the UNDP's first round of primaries translated into double digit approval ratings for the first time and the number two spot overall behind the Grand National Party's Lee Myung-bak. In a similar Donga poll that excluded GNP candidate Lee, Chung now takes first with 21.7 percent with Sohn close behind at 18.5 percent. The leftist Hankyoreh ranked Chung first with 31.2 percent and Sohn second with 28.8 percent among UNDP candidates. National Assembly contacts told poloffs September 19 that the polls revealed the transitory nature of Sohn's supporters and the tendency of Korean voters to back "whoever they think will win." Many pundits speculated that Sohn would gain the UNDP candidacy due to his six-month reign at the top of the polls. However, after a poor showing in the September 15-16 regional primaries, these same pundits now speculate that Sohn could drop out of the race before the end of September.

Lee Drops, Still Comfortable in First

13. (C) The National Assembly contacts were unable to account for Lee's decline to 50 percent, but Lee advisor Dr. Yim Sung-bin ascribed it to the natural fluctuations that occur in polling. He acceded that the result could have been because of attention the UNDP has been getting recently, but cited other articles that put Lee first in hypothetical runoffs between all of the remaining candidates. Assembly contacts note that while Chung is in the lead for now, he is cited as the easiest opponent to beat for Lee due to his

strong association with the southwest Jeolla provinces.

Comment

14. (C) Chung's recent victory has led many to assume that on October 15, it will be Chung who is the victor when the UNDP primary concludes. However, there are still 12 rounds to go in what UNDP strategists are hoping will shape up into a prizefight between three strong candidates and result in an increase in public interest. In such a scenario, any of the three could win with the populous Seoul and Gyeonggi Province votes still to come. If voter turnout remains low, the deciding factor in the UNDP primary will be internal party support where Chung is the clear leader. Additionally, low voter turnout would mean that the party failed to generate interest in this revolutionary "open" primary and its eventual candidate. For now, Chung has some momentum and Sohn's camp is ready to press the panic button.
VERSHBOW